

Dragons Tale

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Summary: Andre's back and this time he's brought a friend to meet Peter and Co. (read Dragons Eyes first)

Dragons Tale

A Dragon's tale

It had been six months since Peter Caine had seen the mysterious mercenary "Dragon". He was no closer now than he had been then to discovering what had transpired between his father and the soldier of fortune those long years ago. It was frustrating, not knowing that part of his fathers life, not knowing if there were any other surprises likely to spring out at him from the dark hole that was his father's past. Kwai Chan Caine was remarkably silent about that relationship, never referring to the younger man who bore his likeness. Yet Peter had noticed that he had taken to looking often at a plain leather journal, one he would not share with his son. Peter could only speculate what it contained. That is, until Ariel came to see him at the precinct.

"Hey, can we talk?" With her fidgety manner and ragged clothes, Ariel would have stood out in any large gathering place, but in the precinct house she seemed to blend into the walls.

"Sure. What's the problem? Is something wrong with my Dad?" Peter reached to pull out a chair for the waif, but she shied away, pacing nervously around his desk. "What's wrong, Ariel?"

"This kid I've been scrounging for, name's Annie, she's gone missing and I want you to find her." Ariel pulled a torn piece of paper from her jacket pocket. It was a notice of a lost child, like many received by the populace of the city in their daily mail. The grainy photo was of a teenage girl, probably no older than thirteen, with pretty eyes and a shy smile. Peter felt his insides constrict with pain. Someone that pretty didn't last long on the mean streets of the city.

"Ariel, why didn't you come to me when you first found her? Or go to my father?"

"Because she begged me not to!" Guilt and frustration radiated from the young vagabond like a cloud. "I knew she didn't have what it took to survive out there, but she said it was better than going home. I've been that route, so I understood. I thought I could help her, maybe get her to trust me, then trust your dad, but she's gone and I don't know what's happened to her. Find her Peter, Please!" Darting past the detective, Ariel disappeared back into her own territory, the streets of the city.

"Great! Now what do I do? I work homicide, not Juvenile." Despite his misgiving, or perhaps because of them, Peter tucked the notice in his jacket and went looking for answers.

The Juvenile division of the 101st precinct wasn't much different from any of the other precinct offices. Only their clientele gave them away. Peter had been told by Jody to ask for Detective Larry Jenner, the senior officer in charge. As Peter walked past the booking desk, he noticed several youthful offenders awaiting transport to a holding cell. Most looked like they should be on their way to junior high, not juvenile detention. he thought _ Peter tore his gaze away from the youngsters and walked up to the open door with Jenner's name. He knocked hesitantly. _

_ "Can I help you?" the man inside the office asked, looking up from a stack of paperwork. Detective Jenner was an older man, with tired eyes and a perpetual scowl on his face. He reminded Peter of his high school principal, a man feared and respected by all the students.

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_ "Yeah, I'm Peter Caine. I work homicide. My partner Jody suggested I talk to you. I need some advice on how to go about looking for a young girl I think may be a runaway. Jody said you were the expert in this sort of thing." He fished the paper Ariel had given him out of his pocket and crossed the office with it, handing it to the man across the desk. _

_ "We get a lot of kids that run away to this city, Det. Caine. Some do it for the sake of rebelling against any authority, some for adventure, most because what they're running from is worse in their minds than what they're running to." Det. Jenner handed the notice back to Caine with a melancholy smile. "I don't recognize this one, but it's been a long time since I could identify every kid that we've picked up." _

_ "If a kid were in trouble, where would they go?" _

_ "Depends on the trouble. There are shelters that are aimed at teenage runaways, plus church groups and volunteer organizations. But no one central place. Most times, they end up here, picked up in a raid for prostitution or drugs. If your girl is out there, it'll be a matter of time before we see her here. I'll let you know if I hear anything." He looked back down at his paperwork, ending the short conversation. _

_ The talk with the veteran juvenile Officer had dispirited Peter. He remembered the problems he had suffered as a teenager, the loss of his father, the temple, his identity. All had been so overwhelming.

He knew he was still dealing with many of the scars of his youth. But being part of Paul Blaisdell's family had given him the stability he needed to navigate the treacherous waters of his adolescence. Some of these kids had nothing to help them, not even happy memories of youth to tide them through. _

_ Peter shook off the darkness that threatened to engulf him and set out for his car. Maybe a talk with his father would put things in perspective. He had barely settled into the seat when he saw the envelope on the seat next to him. _

_ "Hey kid, meet me at your dad's. I've decided to come in from the cold (sort of) and you two are the ones I want to share my story with. That is, if I'm still welcome. Kermit will tell you I'm an arrogant ass to assume that you'll want to talk to me. But there are a few things I'd like to get straight with both you and your dad. So hurry home, wouldn't want you to be late for the party." DRAGON _

_ Peter put the car in reverse and gunned the engine, headed for home. _

_ Not far away, in Chinatown, the lonesome sound of the flute drifted over the rooftops. _

_ "Can't you play anything cheerful?" Caine looked up, startled. Andre was leaning in the doorway, his green eyes alight with mischief. His dark hair was shorter then the last time Caine had seen him, and he sported a dark tan. But the eyes were still the same, still guarded behind their emerald beauty. "I can see I'll have to teach you some new tunes." _

_ "When did you return?" Caine began to rise to greet his kinsman, but the mercenary waved him off.. _

_ "Been here a few days, getting settled and all that stuff. Thought I'd come check up on you." _

_ "I am well. Are you on an assignment?" _

_ Andre faced his cousin with a mysterious grin on his face. "Not exactly. My partner has decided we need to establish alternate lives, away from our "Family". It's supposed to give us some perspective on real life, or life away from the company. Personally, I think she's tired of listening to me complain about living out of backpacks." He pulled his own flute from the knapsack he had left behind the door. "I left Peter a note. He should be here any minute." _

_ "Why are you here, cousin?" Caine watched the mercenary settle into a lotus position opposite from him, and tried to read something from his eyes. _

_ Andre stared back at him, suddenly serious. "I owe you both a story for putting up with me the last time. And I always pay my debts. My partner says we can't be honest with the people we are trying to help if we can't be honest with ourselves and those we love. I can't continue my new path until I've made amends for the old one. You and Peter are my first stop." Andre began to play, a haunting tune that tugged at Caine's soul. It was the tune he had taught his cousin the day they first met. _

_ 1985 - Arizona _

_ Caine looked up at the sound of angry voices coming from the rear of the old church. He had been repairing the stairs leading to the choir loft for Father Morales, as the old priest could no longer manage the use of tools with his arthritic hands. Father Morales, a Jesuit-taught parish priest, had a lively intellect and a lively curiosity about the belief systems of other peoples. He and Caine had spent many hours, late at night, discussing the similarities and differences between their two worlds. Now it seemed the old man needed more than spiritual help. _

_ "What's the matter, kid, no hablo English?" The two rowdies from the Double Bar X ranch were drunk and spoiling for a fight. The frightened boy caught between them couldn't have been older than twelve, yet his eyes spoke volumes of the life he had led since coming from Mexico. Father Morales tried to pull the boy back into the church vestibule, but the larger of the two men, Larry, just pushed the old man aside. "Stay out of this, priest. These kids need to be taught to stay where they belong." _

_ "What kind of person is that?" Caine asked quietly, walking slowly toward the group. _

_ Larry and his friend, Jake, turned on him with ugly smirks on their faces. "Not our kind, chinaman. Just like you." Larry threw a drunk punch, which Caine easily blocked. Jake tried to come to his friends' aid and received a boot in the chest for his trouble. He landed against the open door to his truck. Larry continued to try to press the fight, but Caine pushed away all his drunken swings, trying to dissuade the man from a fight without hurting him. _

_ The sound of the pump action on a shotgun cut through the noise of the fight, attracting the attention of all combatants. A figure was standing in the hot desert sunlight, surrounded by clouds of dust. "I guess your momma never taught you how to place bets, did she? Too bad. Looks like I'll have to do it for her." _

_ "Who the hell are you?" Jake yelled, befuddled by the stranger's sudden appearance. _

_ "I was taking a siesta and your loud mouth woke me up. I get really grouchy when someone wakes me up. In fact, I've been known to kill people for less." The man seemed determined to stay with the sun to his back, so that his opponents would be blinded. Caine took the boy and Father Morales by their arms and led them back to the doorway of the church as the benefactor continued to aim his shotgun at the drunk cowboys. "Now why don't you boys just get on home. I think I hear your mamas calling you." Jake made a hesitant move in the stranger's direction, only to find himself looking down the shotgun's barrel. "Don't make me do something you'll regret, boy. Go on home, Move IT!" _

_ The cowboys tumbled back into their truck and drove drunkenly off, swearing revenge. As the truck disappeared over the horizon, the stranger turned out of the sunlight. _

_ For a moment Caine wondered if his grief over his son's death and his long journey had finally unhinged his mind. The man in front of him was wearing a scruffy beard and mustache and his eyes were so

green they were almost unreal. He was a young man late twenties or early thirties, tall and lean to near gauntness and had an earring in one ear. But it was what Caine saw behind the beard and green eyes that stunned him. This man had his face, the face that had looked out from his mirror when he had been young. The face that Laura had fallen in love with. The face he had when he joined the temple after her death. His face. _

_ The other man seemed as stunned to look upon his doppelganger as Caine was. He examined the older man with a wary eye, looking for ... something to tell him what or who it was he was seeing. His eyes dropped to Caines wrists. Caine cautiously rolled up his sleeves, revealing the tattoos on both his arms. The other man sighed, and did the same. He also had the marks of the Shaolin on his arms. _

_ "Wouldn't you know it. I come to Arizona for a rest and who do I meet but another Shaolin. Go figure." _

_ The stranger turned to walk away when Father Morales spoke out. "Please, let us at least offer you some refreshment for your kindness Mr...?" _

_ "Andre McMaster. No thanks, padre, churches make me nervous. So do Shaolin priests." _

_ "I am Kwai Chan Caine. It is an honor to meet another of my brethren..." _

_ "I'm not your brother!" Andre turned, suddenly angry. "I'm not Shaolin anymore, in case you hadn't noticed. The only reason I bothered with this fight is cause the kid was getting the crap beat out of him and ... I don't like bullies." _

_ Caine reached out a hand to the young man, his own anger at the treatment of the old priest and the boy. "Father Morales means you no harm, nor do I. Please, come and sit a while with us. The day is hot and you must be thirsty." _

_ Andre thought, sighing with frustration. "Fine, just a glass of water and I'm out of here." He slung the shotgun over his shoulder and moved into the shade of the doorway, managing to avoid Caine's hand as it reached out to take his arm. _

_ Caine shrugged, noting that Andre didn't like to be touched. Father Morales led the group, including the still-frightened young boy, into the priest's residence and began to pour iced water for all. Caine pulled out his flute and began to play a tune his master had taught him, many years before, one he had planned to teach Peter if fate had not intervened. _

_ "I know that tune." Andre spoke suddenly, staring at Caine intently. "One of my masters would play that for us when I and my friends were novices. He left the temple before he could teach it to me." _

_ "You play, then?" Caine asked, cautiously. _

_ "I used to. I lost my flute... a long time ago. Along with my innocence. " Andre stared at the ice in his glass, fighting back the flood of memories crowding to the surface. "Funny thing. I never

thought I would hear that song again." _

_ "I could teach it to you. I have another flute." Caine held out his flute for Andreas, who reluctantly took it. He played a practice scale while Caine retrieved his spare flute and began to follow along as Caine played. The sound of the two flutes echoed eerily throughout the near-empty residence, like two birds singing a sad lament. Finally, Andre put his flute down, and leaned his face on his hands.

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_ "I'm tired. Too tired. I think I'd better go." _

_ Father Morales put out a restraining hand. "No, we have room here. Please stay and let me repay you for your kindness." _

_ "Yes, stay. I would enjoy speaking to one who has known the life I have known." Caine, noticing that Andre was shaking from fatigue, rose to lead him to the residence's spare room. _

_ "You may get more than what you bargained for with me, Shaolin. The Temple isn't the only place I've been." If he could have, Andre would have run out the back door and into the shadows. But he was too weary of running, and it was comforting to be in the presence of one who reminded him of his life before Vietnam. "Maybe just for tonight." he thought. "Just till I get myself together. Then I'm gone and no one gets hurt." _

_ That one night stretched out to almost a year. _

_ Present day Chinatown _

_ "And that's how your dad and I met." Andre stretched his tired muscles and looked over at his attentive audience. _

_ "Did those drunks ever come back?" Peter asked somberly. _

_ Andre gave the serious young detective a sad smile "Trust a cop to think of that. Yeah, they came back, but we didn't have to deal with them. Turns out, the local sheriff was a devoted Catholic who was royally pissed off at the thought that someone would mess with a priest. Those boys would have been doing hard time, if he had anything to say about it. Lucky for them, Father Morales had a forgiving nature. Your dad and I moved on a couple of days later."

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_ Caine had watched his son's face while Andre had told of their first meeting. Many emotions had played on Peter's face, from disbelief to anger to sadness. Now, his face was devoid of emotion, as though he had become aware of giving away too much of his soul to those around him. Andre's eyes also had been more than normally expressive as he retold the tale of their first meeting. Now they also were guarded, revealing nothing. The story had brought many old emotions to the surface of Caine's heart as well. But he knew he had not revealed as much to the two younger men as they had to him. _

_ A soft sound from behind them distracted the group from their reveries. "Hello, anyone home?" a woman's voice called out from the doorway. _

_ "Hey, Luv, come join the party." Andre jumped up and held his hands

out to the woman who appeared at Caine's door. She was as tall as Dragon, slender without being too thin and had long, dark hair in a single braid down her back. Her dark jeans and dark silk shirt had allowed her to blend into the shadows just outside the door. "This is my new partner, Lady Jade. Jade, this is Det. Peter Caine and his father, Kwai Chan Caine. I told you about them." _

_ "You've told me about a lot of people, Dragon. Tell me, Mr. Caine, was my partner always this talkative? There are times I can't get him to shut up. Which can be rather difficult if you're trying to line up a target." Jade smiled up at the mercenary, noting the flush that appeared on his face as she chided him. "He did tell me about a "Cousin" he had in this area? That's how I knew where to find him."

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_ "Lady Jade? That's an unusual name." Peter remarked, smiling his winning smile at the dark haired beauty. Grinning wickedly, Andre watched his younger cousin's reaction to his partner. _

_ "It's ... a nickname. I rarely give my real names in public. Old superstitions die hard. Wouldn't want anyone to have power over me by knowing my true name. Dragon, of course, who could care less if people know who he is and where to find him." Jade smiled in exasperated amusement at her partner, knowing he was finding the detective's interest in her very funny. _

_ "You have come to take him back to his employers?" Caine questioned, looking not at the girl, but at his cousin. _

_ "I am his employer, in a manner of speaking. And no, I haven't come to get him for any particular reason. Right now I'm trying to get some of my company's new recruits accustomed to a different, less exciting lifestyle. Actually, I just came to ask him if he's seen Daniel." _

_ "Who's Daniel?" Peter asked, tearing his eyes away from the girl to look at Andre. _

_ "One of our part-timers. He runs a shelter for runaways here in the city when he doesn't run courier work for us." Andre looked out at the city thoughtfully, rubbing his eyes as he thought. "Last time I talked to someone about him, they said he kept going on about a bunch of young girls disappearing from the shelter. He had some idea that one of the Old Guard might have had something to do with their disappearance." _

_ "Old Guard?" Caine asked, moving to prepare tea for his guests.

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_ Jade shot her partner a look. "My partner tends to open his mouth and insert his foot...right up to the kneecap." _

_ Andre shrugged, unaffected by her irritation. "Kwai Chang already knew what I did for a living, partner. I figured by now, so did Peter. There's no need to talk in riddles around them." _

_ Jade surrendered to the inevitable, hoping this breach in security would not come back to bite them later. "There are those members of the Intelligence community who feel that violence and murder of civilians is the way to control the world." She picked up a package

of tea leaves and examined it thoughtfully as she spoke. " They are the Old Guard. Many of us, the generation who have had to live in the world their evil has created, are trying to right many of their wrongs. It sometimes feels like a hopeless task, but we try. After all, they will die eventually and I, for one, do not relish living in a world of their creation." She laid the package down again and wandered over to where Caine kept his herbs and medicines, scanning them with a curious eye. "Your cousin is an apothecary? Interesting."

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_ "Why interesting?" Peter asked, trying out his most charming smile on Dragon's lovely partner. _

_ "Chill out, kid." Andre laughed, moving between Peter and Jade with a fluid stride. "She's not into little boys." _

_ "Andre, you really should learn some tact." Jade smiled at her partner and slapped him lightly on the cheek. "What he means is I am more attracted to older men than men my own age. And the reason I think it is interesting that your father is an apothecary is that Dragon is one as well. I find these similarities worthy of note, don't you?" _

_ Someone's beeper went off and everyone but Caine automatically checked to see if it was theirs. Peter flipped open his cellular phone and dialed the number on his beeper. _

_ It was Detective Jenner, from the Juvenile Dept. His voice sounded depressed. "Detective Caine, I thought you ought to know, that girl you were looking for has turned up. Unfortunately, she's on her way to the morgue. Someone strangled her. We found her body just twenty minutes ago, when we raided a house in the hills." Jenner sounded tired, like a man who hadn't slept peacefully for many, many nights. "We got a report of a bunch of juveniles using the place as a hangout for drug deals. Looks like that's not all they were using it for."

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_ "Thanks, Jenner. Give me the address and I'll be right there." Peter was searching his pockets for something to write with when Jade handed him a pen and a scrap of paper. He scribbled the address Jenner gave him on the margin of the sheet and hung up his phone. Then he took a good look at the page she had given him. _

_ "This is the same runaway child notice that Ariel gave me. She was looking for this girl. Why do you have it?" Peter looked from Andre to his partner, waiting for their reply. _

_ It was Jade who finally answered. "That is one of the reasons I wanted to talk to him. I had heard through the grapevine that Daniel was looking for her too. He told one of my people that she was one of the girls who had disappeared from his shelter. Have you discovered something about her?" _

_ "That was Detective Jenner from the Juvenile Division. He says they just found this girl, dead in a house in the hills. How do we find your friend Daniel?" _

_ Jade gave Peter an icy look. "Daniel wouldn't kill. It's not in his nature. But someone might have felt they were both too dangerous a loose end to leave walking around. Dragon, I think we had better hit

the streets and start looking for Daniel, before it's too late." _

_ "I'll go with Peter. Why don't you get on the computer system and see if there's an operation in the area we should know about?" Andre gave Peter a look which brooked no opposition. "We'll meet back here in an hour." He was almost out of the door before he realized that Peter wasn't following him. "Is there a problem, detective?" _

_ Peter looked from Andre to his father, trying to decide whether it was worth the protest. Finally he shrugged and moved toward the door. "No problem, just tell me. How do I explain you to the officers on the scene?" _

_ "Tell them he's your brother. If they've met Kwai Chan, its a story they'll believe without further questing. And I will make it right with your captain." Jade dismissed the two younger men with a wave of her hand, then turned to the older Shaolin. "Could you ask around the community, see if anyone has heard of anything unusual in the area. Anyone asking about runaways or shelters for teenagers on the street, that sort of thing." _

_ " I would be honored to be of assistance." Caine bowed to the agent, then moved to put away his tea set. _

_ "Why don't you leave that out? I'll have some tea ready for us when we meet back here. I know Andre would appreciate it after being at a crime scene. He says death leaves a bad taste in his mouth." Jade pulled her car keys out of her pocket and scanned the room quickly. "Do you have a phone line here? I'd like to set up my laptop and do a quick scan of the various Agency coputers. It might tell me who's working in the area. I could just tap into the phone lines from the next building over, but it would be easier to do it from here." _

_ "No but I know of someone who does and who will be happy to assist you. She is the granddaughter of my friend, Lo Si. They live only a few blocks away. Come, I will introduce you." He pulled on his hat and proceeded her through the door. Jade stopped at her car to retrieve her portable computer then followed him down the block. As they walked, Caine debated asking the woman about his cousin's dreams. Andre's night terrors had always been preceded by violence in his waking life, and this situation promised to be ugly. He wondered if she knew about the dreams. _

_ Jade wondered, also, if Caine knew about the dreams. In all their conversations, Andre had never come out and told her whether Caine knew their origin or not. But she did, and she had seen the results of his dreams first-hand. His night terrors were better now, but Jade knew that it wouldn't take much to set them off again. She wondered if Caine knew about the dreams and how to control his cousin when his dream state became his reality. _

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_ Peter and Andre made good time in the city traffic, arriving at the crime scene before sundown. Andre pulled his jacket collar up, and scanned the area, looking for the tell-tale signs of Company business while Peter talked to the uniform officers still on guard. Both men had been silent during the ride to this house of death, each for his own reason. For Andre, it was another death of innocence, like many others he had seen before. For Peter, it was a new horror, one he was

trying to accept and cope with, lest he appear weak to the mercenary at his side. _

_ "Uniforms say those kids have been camped out here for days. I won't know how long she's been dead until I talk to the coroner." Peter reached out to touch Andre's arm, sensing he wasn't being listened to by the experienced soldier. _

_ Andre pulled back, pushing the detective's hand away with a practiced move. "Don't touch unless you've been invited, kid. I've taken people's hands off for less. Let's go inside and poke around." Andre started up the walk to the ramshackle house. Peter followed, annoyed with himself for not remembering Andre's dislike of physical contact. He made a mental note to talk to his father about what else he should know about Andre's likes and dislikes before the older mercenary followed through on his not-so-subtle threats. _

_ "Peter, over here." Jody came out of the front door of the structure, holding a plastic bag in one hand. She did a double take, staring at Andre as though he were an alien species. "Who's this?"

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_ Andre flipped open his wallet and flashed an identification card in her general direction. "His older brother. I'm Andre Caine, San Francisco Homicide. You must be Jody. Peter's told me so much about you." Andre smiled his most winning smile, just managing to not look like a tiger sizing up his prey. _

_ "Are you here on an investigation or just visiting?" Jody asked, eyeing both men curiously. _

_ "Both. So, find anything interesting?" The mercenary looked pointedly at the plastic evidence bag in woman's hand. _

_ "I'll tell you about it later, Jody. What did you find?" Peter took the plastic bag from her hand and held it up to the light. Inside was a business card, with the name "Lost Souls Shelter" and an address printed on it. He held it out to Andre. "Look familiar?" _

_ "Yes, this is the name of Daniel's shelter. Someone in there must have been there or had contact with someone from the shelter." Andre examined the card thoughtfully. "He was forever trying to give these out to kids on the street, to convince them there was some place they could go to be safe." _

_ "Maybe Daniel decided to make the streets a little more unsafe for these kids." Peter handed the card back to Jody and motioned his companion inside. Once away from the other officers, he looked carefully at his companion than looked back at his partner. "What's with the fake badge, anyway? And how did you know who Jody was? She wasn't around the last time you graced us with your presence." _

_ "Easier to let them think I'm on a busman's holiday than explaining I'm a spy looking for a runaway associate. As for Jody, I checked you out after the last time. Even got photos of all your associates, so that I would know them if I ran into them. Like my partner says, better to be safe than dead." Andre chuckled, glancing back at his associate. "By the way, you were about to make an ass of yourself with her. Jade, I mean." _

_ "Really? Maybe you're the one who was being an ass," Peter sputtered, suddenly angry. _

_ "Chill out, Peter. I know her pretty well. She never takes up with anyone outside of the Company - or with her partners. So if you're wondering if we're an item, forget it. She's my confessor, my sparring partner, and most important to me, my friend. That's all."

_ "I guess that's enough," Peter replied, suddenly ashamed of what he'd been thinking. _

_ The two men separated, each taking a portion of the house to search. It would almost thirty minutes before they spoke again. _

_ Across town, Lady Jade shut down her laptop with a sigh. She had set her small laptop up on the end table and sat cross-legged on the floor in front of it. There had been no evidence of Company business in this area, no supplies ordered for the infamous "Black Box" that the Agency often employed to entertain its less reputable clientele. She knew that such evidence was easily hidden, but also knew that the Agency wouldn't bother to do so. It wasn't as though they believed they had anything to be ashamed of. _

_ "You found nothing?" Caine asked gently, noting her somber demeanor. "No. I'm afraid this may just be a random street killing. It happens to young runaways. They take to the street believing that anything is better than where they were, and find that often, anything is what they get." Jade stretched out her hand to Caine for help in getting up of the floor. He pulled her up gently, noting the wince of pain she could not quite hide. _

_ "Something is troubling you. Perhaps I can relieve your pain." He brushed his hand across her cheek, tilting her face to look at him.

_ "Nothing a hot bath and a good night's sleep won't cure." She shrugged him off gently, mentally making a note to herself to see about getting something for the sore muscles which were slowing her movements. _

_ "Does your pain come from my cousin Andre?" _

_ She turned to look into his gentle eyes. "It's nothing. Just some bruises from a training session that went badly. Rookies can be so unpredictable and this one was just plain uncoordinated." She saw instantly that her attempt at an explanation was falling flat. It was obvious that Caine knew, or at least suspected, the real reason for her injuries. _

_ "I remember Andre's nightmares. He had no control over his own strength. " Caine's voice was quiet, his eyes focusing directly on hers. _

_ "He doesn't always wake up in time to stop himself. Most times, he can hear my voice in whatever hell his dreams thrust him into. But sometimes, I guess I'm just not loud enough to be heard over his ghosts. You see, we'd been on a case tracking members of a drug cartel. It was a bad assignment from day one, with lots of dead civilians, no sleep and more adrenaline rushes than the human body

should endure. But he was coping, no problems. He was fine until we got back to home base and debriefed. Then, it all came flooding out. But, it's not bad, I've learned how to protect myself. But Dragon doesn't know he's hurt me. I managed to get him back to his bed without waking him up. He thinks the bruises are from a fall I took jumping onto a truck while making our get-away from Medellin in Columbia. You must promise me, Kwai Chan Caine, on your cousin's soul, you'll never tell him. If he knew, he'd never reach out to me again. We both know what that would mean." _

_ He would be lost in the darkness, forever. But if he hurts you..." Caine frowned, fearful that this young woman would not realize the danger she had placed herself in. _

_ "I'm a lot tougher than I look." Jade smiled, a gentle smile that warmed the room. "We'd better get back before the boys return. And I've got to get in touch with Peter's superior at the precinct. If it's a Company matter, then it's best if the locals are told enough to keep them out of our hair. Anyway, it may only be a local problem. Some slug getting his jollies by hurting young girls. However, Dragon and I may still have a problem." _

_ "What problem is that?" _

_ "Where is Daniel? If the company were involved in the disappearance of this teen, then I would know where to look for him, or more appropriately, his body. But if this is a random killing, then he could be anywhere. It could even be him responsible for this death." Jade picked up her laptop and started for the door. "It's very unlikely, but I've learned over the years that in a world gone mad, anything is possible." _

_ Caine agreed sadly, thinking of the pain he had seen inflicted on innocents by Tan and others of his ilk. But perhaps, this time, this little group could stem the madness, if only for a little while. _

_ _

_ By the time Peter and Andre returned to Caine's home, Jade had hidden away her computer under one of Caine's worktables and prepared tea. The call to her local contact, made at the home of Lo Si's granddaughter, had been accomplished and word would be filtering down to the ranking officer at the 101st precinct about some "unusual" personnel looking into a local case. Jade sipped her tea slowly, focusing on the problems the disappearance of one of her "talented amateurs" would pose for her unique organization. Andre entered the apartment in his usual careful manner, giving the room a quick examination before committing himself to entering it. He took the mug of tea from his partner and settled himself on the floor, with his back to the wall and his eyes on the door. Jade stretched out against the opposite wall, watching the open window as they talked. _

_ Did you find anything at the crime scene?" she asked, motioning Peter to help himself to the tea on the brazier. _

_ "Nothing that would denote Company activity. Place was filthy, not like other operations run by Black Ops. They're usually so paranoid about anyone finding out they exist, they leave the place sanitized." Andre took a sip of his tea and made a face at his friend. "What is it with you and mint tea? Can't we have something else every so

often?" _

_ Jade laughed, relieved that the visit to the murder scene had not yet taken hold of Andre's mind. "Don't complain to me if you don't like it. I tried to make you other flavors of tea but you wouldn't drink them." _

_ Peter settled on a stool where he could watch the couple's friendly bickering. That they were close was evident by the ease in which the play-argued with one another. It was interesting to note that despite their light banter, both were on guard against outside attack, even taking up defensive positions opposite each other to better protect themselves. He hadn't noticed if Jade carried a gun -- he'd been a little nervous about looking that close -- but Andre was definitely still wearing the shoulder holster Peter had seen him wear before. It was disconcerting to see a weapon being carried by a man who had been trained for peace in the same way as his father. It seemed so unreal.

_

_ Jade noticed the detective's intense scrutiny with amusement. "By the way, Peter, your father should be back in a few minutes. He was trying to locate someone he thought might give us a lead about the disappearances in Daniel's shelter. Someone named Ariel?" _

_ "Ariel is a homeless girl whom my father had sort of taken in. She steals to help provide for other homeless people. A nice kid." Peter took a drink of his tea and almost dropped it, the heat of the liquid burning his mouth. _

_ "Andre likes very hot tea. He says it keeps him awake. Personally, I just think he's into pain." Jade glanced at her partner with a conspiratorial smile on her face. "Tell me detective, what's your father into?" _

_ It took all the self-control Andre had developed over years as a mercenary not to laugh at the shocked look on Peter Caine's face. Andre had seen that look on his partner's face before, usually just when she was about to try to shock someone who didn't know her wicked sense of humor. He usually went along with her because it amused him to see other people's pretense blown away. But he had the distinct feeling that the subject of sex and his father was not one that Peter Caine would take much teasing on. Luckily, Caine chose that moment to return. _

_ "I could not find Ariel. No one has seen her since she went to you for help." Caine picked up the last remaining cup and poured out the remnants of the tea from its pot. "It is strange. She is usually not so difficult to find." He took a sip in silence, concern on his face. The two mercenaries looked across the room at each other, sadly knowing looks on their faces. Peter stared at the floor, anything not to see the knowledge in their eyes. _

_ A cellular phone rang, breaking the awkward silence. Jade fished the phone she had retrieved with her laptop out of her jacket pocket and flipped it open. "This is Jade. Speak." _

_ "Jade, it's Daniel. I'm in trouble." The voice at the other end of the line was weary and scared but not hysterical. Not the voice of a man who had just committed murder. "Some nut just killed one of my kids." _

_ "Where are you?" Jade asked. _

_ "Is Dragon with you?" Daniel answered, suddenly tense. _

_ "Why? Is there a problem?" Jade looked at her partner quizzically. Andre shrugged. _

_ "I don't trust him. Where ever he goes, death follows." Daniel's voice was beginning to fade, as though he was moving out of the phone's range. _

_ Jade's hands tightened into fists, anger for her friend stiffening her muscles. Her voice betrayed nothing of her emotions. "If you don't trust him, you don't trust me. I am afraid we are a package deal. There is a police detective here you might be more comfortable with. His name is Peter Caine. He is investigating the murder of your client. I'll put him on the line." She tossed the phone to Peter, fighting to regain her control. Few things upset her as much as disparaging remarks about her friend, especially from someone who knew next to nothing about him. Andre held out a hand to her, motioning her to calm down. _

_ Caine watched the tableau in front of him intently. He saw the woman's defensive anger when her friend was maligned and his cousin's instinctive move to calm her. He laid his cup down on the workbench and waited for events to unfold. _

_ Peter listened intently as Daniel relayed his location to him then folded the phone down. "He said to say he was sorry if he made you mad. He also sounded pretty scared when he said that. Does he have a reason?" _

_ "She has a formidable temper when someone attacks her family, Peter. Much like mine. I suppose that's why we get along so well. Neither of us can be overwhelmed or frightened by the other." Andre rose to his feet in a fluid motion, like a cat stretching after a nap. "So, where is the idiot?" _

_ "Some place he described as a Company safe-house, not far from the crime scene. He said Jade would know where it was." Peter moved to help the woman up and found his father had already reached out to take her hand, holding her steady as she rose to her feet. He suspected that she didn't so much need the help as she liked having the older man's attention. "So where is this place?" _

_ "If it's the one I'm thinking of, it hasn't been used for ages. Too hard to defend. Did he tell you anything else?" Jade frowned as she laid her cup down. "Anything about who he suspects?" _

_ "Nothing. Just some guy he says was hassling the young girls at the center." Peter moved for the door and found his way blocked by Andre. The mercenary deliberately stood in his way, as though daring the younger man to move him. "Is there a problem, Dragon?" His tight voice was not lost on anyone in the room. _

_ Caine reached out a hand to son, confused by his anger. Peter tightened as he felt his father's touch, then deliberately relaxed. It wasn't his father's fault, after all, that he was feeling like he was in the way, like he wasn't needed. _

_ Jade made a sign to her partner to let the detective go then moved to Andre's side when he hesitated. She reached up and deliberately pulled on the mercenaries earring to keep his attention focused on her. She waited till his emerald eyes were looking directly into her soft brown ones. "Andre, take Peter to the safe house. It's on Amber drive, the house with the lousy brick wall in front of it. You remember, it's the one Daniel tried to wreck his car in front of the day his wife left him. Kwai Chan and I will go to the shelter and see what we can learn from the staff and others there. Try not to kill each other in the process, please. You're too expensive to replace." She released his earring and tapped him gently on the nose. "Play nice boys or you'll get no dessert with dinner." _

_ Andre grinned, his good humor restored by her teasing words. "Yes, mother. Come on, kid, before she sends us to bed with no supper." He strode out with Peter trailing in his wake, leaving Caine and Lady Jade alone in the suddenly calm apartment. _

_ "I would not have thought that Andre would have allowed himself to be touched in that manner." Caine said, appreciating her calm, accepting way with his troubled cousin. _

_ Jade shrugged, unconcerned. "I'm usually the only one he'll let touch him. He doesn't really trust anyone else. At least, that's what he says." _

_ "Perhaps we should not leave them alone. They seem to find the worst in each other." _

_ "That's just Andre. He'll push and push until Peter pushes back. He likes to know where his limits are with people. So do I. That's why I know he won't knock me into next year if I take him by the ear. Sometimes the only way to get his attention is to force him to look at me." She looked the Shaolin priest up and down, trying to decide how far to go with this line of conversation. He was an interesting character, more her type than his tempestuous kinsman, and quite unaware of his effect on her. She decided, for now, to tuck that interesting project away for future reference and move on with this case. "We'd better get going. It'll be dark by the time we get to the shelter." _

_ Caine led her from the apartment, aware of her intense scrutiny. He was not sure why he interested her so, but for now, he would bear her scrutiny without question. There were other, more important matters to be investigated. _

_ Peter and Andre drove back to the area of the crime in strained silence. Peter knew he was acting childishly, but something about this man at his side made him feel like a awkward teenager pretending to be an adult. Andre and his partner were professional soldiers and he was just a local cop. Nothing Peter had seen on the force could touch the experiences that Andre had acquired as a Company operative. And he had to admit, he was jealous of his father's attachment to a man that Caine had know for so brief a time. _

_ "So tell me more about the time you and my father traveled together," Peter suggested, trying to draw the mercenary into conversation. _

_ "That really bothers you, doesn't it? That I spent time with your dad when you thought he was dead. Take my word for it, kid. He never forgot you. And he sure as hell never tried to replace you with me." Andre shifted uncomfortably in his seat, watching the scenery roll by as Peter drove. "I wasn't up for being anyone's son or student. I think he saw some of himself in me, beyond the fact that we looked so much alike. Perhaps he felt that he was looking at himself if things had gone differently in his life. Maybe that's why I didn't leave the first day we met. I saw in him some part of my soul that I had lost. Frankly, when we met, all I wanted was to find a hole to climb into that I could pull in on top of me. " _

_ "Why did you leave him?" Peter asked, hesitant to bring up bad memories. _

_ "I was having some pretty bad nightmares. Still do, sometimes, but nothing like those days. I could usually wake myself up before your old man could come in and check on me, but one night, I didn't. I started to dream about being back in Vietnam, with my father." _

_ "You fought in Vietnam? I thought you were raised in a Shaolin Temple?" Peter looked over at the mercenary in amazement. _

_ "I was. My father was an American and my mother was Chinese. My mother's people didn't appreciate her marriage to a non-Chinese, so when she died giving birth to me, they told him we both died. Then they sent me to live with her brother at the temple. I didn't find out any of this until it was time for me to leave. My dad was working for the Red Cross in Nam so I arranged to contact him. He had me flown out to a village he was working in." Andre could feel his heart start to race at the memories. He knew if he continued the nightmares catch up with him tonight, but Caine's son deserved an answer to the questions his father had never asked. "We were only together for a short while before the village was totaled. I was away at the time, so I don't even know which side did the killing. All I know is when I came back from gathering herbs up on the mountain, everyone I knew, including my father, was dead. I blamed myself for a long time. You know the drill, If I had been there it would have been different, the whole nine yards. In my dreams, the dead call to me, begging me for help, begging their Shaolin priest to save them. I never can. I wandered around pretty messed up until the Company found me and offered me a job as an operative. Talk about a deal with the Devil. Anyway, that last night, your father could hear me screaming in my sleep. He tried to wake me. Bad mistake. He became a part of my dream, something dark that I had to destroy to save the village. By the time I woke up, I had backed your father into a corner and was about to try to rip his heart out. Scared us both pretty good." _

_ Peter shook his head in amazement. "I didn't think anyone could take on my father and win." _

_ Andre looked at the detective with a grin. "Who said I would have won? If I hadn't woken up when I did, your father would have had to defend himself, and I probably would have been meat for the beast. Anyway, the next day I told him I had received orders to return to my Control agent and that was that." _

_ "Didn't he try to stop you?" _

_ "He knew he couldn't. It just wasn't time for me to be whole yet."

Andre looked sharply at the street sign and motioned to Peter "Take a left at the light and go to the end of the road. From there we walk."

_

_ After reaching the end of the road and securing their vehicle, the men started up the dimly-lit path toward a house hidden in the recesses of the hills. Peter was in a more thoughtful mood, having heard Dragon's story. It seemed his confident relation was once as shattered as Peter sometimes still felt. He had also had the experience of treading on the broken shards of his memories. Perhaps they had some small things in common after all. _

_ "Why doesn't this guy like you?" Peter asked, pushing aside some overgrown vegetation. _

_ "I'm not sure. Part of it is that he's got some sort of complex about rescuing people from their own darkness. He thinks that my partner could be "rescued" if he could only get her away from me."

_

_ "Does she want to be rescued?" Peter asked, thinking of the dead runaway. _

_ "The only darkness she sees are the shadows she blasts away with the light of truth. I'm the one lost in darkness. Or I was. But he doesn't see that." Andre looked over at his companion, suddenly wary. "I get where you're going with this, Peter. You think that Daniel may have killed that girl to rescue her from her own darkness. I don't know. He's pretty screwy, but I'm not sure he has the stomach for killing." _

_ "We'll find out soon enough. There's the house." Peter pointed toward a dilapidated stone wall and an even sadder looking house just beyond it. A figure on the front step motioned them forward. _

_ Peter started forward, eager to talk to someone who could provide information on this horrible crime. Andre, with the customary caution of a man shot at too many times, hung back. _

_ "I think I'll do a perimeter sweep while you talk to Daniel." Andre unholstered his gun, and moved off the path. _

_ "Where will I find you when I'm done?" Peter asked, squinting to see his cousins outline in the shadows. _

_ "I'll find you." Only the voice remained from the spot where Andre had stood. Now, not even that lingered to give away his position.

_

_ Peter hesitated for an instant, then proceeded toward the house and possibly some answers. _

_ Lady Jade had grown tired of trying to find the truth behind the stories the teenagers at the shelter were relating to her. They all had grandiose stories to tell, the better to conceal the truth from themselves and others. Jade knew this was a defensive mechanism, a way to keep the pain at bay. Most of these children, for that was what they were, had lived with more pain than she could imagine, even with her years of Company experience. Some had come from physically or sexually abusive homes. Some had seen their parents in the thrall

of substance abuse. Some simply felt that no one wanted to hear what they had to say. All of them had resorted to the street to find the love they felt was missing from their lives. Many had found the hard realities of the street too much to bear. Lies were so much easier to live with. _

_ "Have you found anything useful in their words?" Caine asked, silently appearing from around a corner. _

_ She turned sharply, forcing herself not to drop into a defensive stance. "Don't come up on me with no warning. It's not safe. Luckily, I'm somewhat used to it from Andre, but even he gets hit for it sometimes. And no, I didn't find anything terribly useful." She tapped one foot nervously, scanning the shelter for someone else to speak to. "They all agree that the girl was here, then she wasn't and that Daniel has been looking for her. Other than that, no one knows anything." _

_ Caine watched sadly as the teenagers played pool in one corner of the building. He had also been effected by the pain these children were carrying. Some part of him wondered if Peter might not have ended up in place like this if Paul Blaisdell and his family had not given him a secure anchor to his life. _

_ "Perhaps we should continue to look for Ariel. She may be more willing to speak to you than these people were." Caine gently laid a hand on Jade's back, allowing her to proceed him from the shelter. Outside, the sun had gone down and the street lights were glowing, accentuating the shadows stretching from the alleyways. Caine's sharp eyes noted one shadow that looked familiar. "Come, I think I see her." _

_ Jade had also seen the form of a young woman entering the alley. She followed the priest into the enclosed area against her better judgment. Having been trapped in alleys in far away places before she felt that walking into one without scouting the area first was a bit foolhardy. But Caine seemed to know where he was going. She caught sight of the elusive figure they were following as it moved into the shelter of a doorway and was struck by how young this girl was to be living on the streets. But then, they had all been young in that shelter. _

_ "Ariel, I have been searching for you. Are you all right?" Caine touched her face gently, examining her with a kindly eye. _

_ "I just had to get off the streets for a while. Someone's been picking up girls from the shelter and they never come back again." Aerial glanced at the woman at Caine's side, taking in what little detail she could see in the darkness. "Caine, I think I know who is taking these girls away. I saw him with Annie, the kid I went to Peter about. Now I heard on the street that she's dead. Maybe he killed her!" _

_ "Who did you see her with, Ariel?" Jade asked, her voice low and soft, with the same serenity in her voice she used to calm frightened animals. _

_ Aerial gave them both a nervous look "It was the guy that runs the shelter. His name is Daniel." _

_ Andre moved quietly into the shadows surrounding the ramshackle house. This was the environment where he was the most comfortable, the world of the hunter. A world where the slightest sound could bring you face to face with death. Darkness was his ally and he made use of his talent for stealth to move closer to the back door of the house. Inside, he could hear music playing, sounds which would cover his entrance if he needed them to. He scanned the windows, looking for the signs of the security system the Company had installed when they'd first used this as a safe house. All that remained were the wires. He cautiously opened the window and slipped in. _

_ Peter reached the front door of the house, gun in hand, about the time that Andre was beginning his approach in the rear. The figure at the door was a man, no longer young, with rumpled clothing and a two day growth of beard. His eyes were red-rimmed, as though he had been crying. The man stared at Peter with suspicion, his eyes resting on the gun in the detective's hand. Reluctantly, Peter returned his pistol to its holster and held out his empty hands to the wary figure. _

_ "Okay, no guns. I just want to talk. I'm Peter Caine. You must be Daniel?" he asked, hoping there was not another player in this game he would have to get to know. _

_ "Yeah, I'm Daniel. Daniel McCoy. Where's Dragon?" _

_ "He's around somewhere. I guess he didn't like the front door approach." Peter put his hands in his pockets, and waited for the man to make the first move. He didn't wait long. _

_ Daniel sighed and motioned to follow him into the house, holding the door for Peter to enter before him. Inside the rooms were dark and dusty, the furniture mostly covered with dust sheets except for a pair of chairs in the front room and a cot in front of the fireplace. Daniel turned his radio off then sat on the edge of the cot, his head in his hands. Peter circled the room, looking for evidence of the dead girls presence in the area. A half eaten apple and some hair ribbons were kicked in a corner, as though someone had tried to sweep them up and then changed their minds. _

_ "She's dead, isn't she?" Daniel asked, laying back on the cot. "Annie, I mean. I had a feeling when I couldn't find her on the streets or at the shelter." _

_ "When was the last time you saw her, Mr. McCoy?" Peter asked, sympathetically. _

_ "Last night. I took her from the shelter and brought her here. She had said she was going to leave the shelter, go back to the streets. Said we were as bad as her parents, always telling her what to do. I thought I could talk some sense into her. Maybe convince her to go home. But she just laughed and ran out. I lost her in the dark at the end of the road. I should have just shipped her home when I first saw her." Daniel closed his eyes wearily, fighting his fatigue. _

_ "Well, you didn't Daniel old man. But then you always were a seriously bad judge of character. After all, look at who you married." Andre appeared suddenly at the door, his arms crossed across his chest. "Come on, buddy. What happened? Did you make a pass at her and get laughed at. Is that why you killed her?" _

_ "That's not what happened!" Daniel screamed, jumping suddenly off the cot. He glared at the mercenary with undisguised hatred. "I never touched her." _

_ "Prove it to me." Andre shrugged, moving to flank the distraught man. Peter kept himself on the opposite side, ready to help in case Daniel made a break for the door. "Daniel, everyone in the company knows your problems since your wife left you. I've heard several women talk to Jade about your raging at them when they flirted with you. You even blew up at Jade once. Or have you conveniently forgotten how you mistook her concern for something more. You freak when you think someone is stringing you along, just cause your wife was fooling around on you. Is that what happened here? Did she flirt with you to get you to help her leave the shelter, then laugh at you when you pressed the issue?" _

_ "No!" Daniel collapsed, weeping, on the cot. Andre sighed, frustrated. Peter shrugged, then walked over to touch the man on the shoulder. _

_ "I'm going to have to take you in for questioning since you appear to be one of the last persons to see the deceased alive. If you're innocent, we'll find the truth. If your not, then its time for this to end. At any rate, you can't stay here." Peter helped the man to his feet and got him moving toward the door. Andre trailed behind them, still watching for movement where there should be none. On the trail down to the car, Peter began to think about what the possibilities were that this emotional man was a cold blooded killer. That the man had problems was evidently documented, from what Andre had said. But were those problems enough to cause him to kill a teenage girl? _

_ Reaching the car in the dark was an adventure in itself. Luckily, Andre's night vision was excellent, allowing him to chose the path of least resistance back down to the vehicle. Peter decided that both he and Daniel would ride in the back if Andre would drive, the better to ensure that the suspect would reach the precinct in one piece. Andre, however, had other ideas in mind. _

_ "I pushed him on the issue of those complaints from other women he has worked with to see if I could get him to talk. Didn't work like I had hoped. Look, lets take him to your dad's. If anyone can get the truth out of him, it's my partner. Or your dad. Either way, you don't have enough to hold him for any length of time, and I don't relish letting him go without some sort of assurance that we know where he is." Andre looked back at the pair through the rear view mirror, noting the frown on Peter's face. "I know, not regulation. But since when has that stopped either of us?" _

_ Peter grinned, knowing Andre was right. "Right, then let's go to my father's. I'm game if you are." _

_ They drove back to Chinatown in silence, each wrapped in their own thoughts. _

_ Pt. 10 _

_ Back in town, Caine and Jade had talked for a while longer to Aerial then sent her on her way. Her revelation about Daniel had been

disheartening, yet not totally unexpected. Who else would the young runaway have trusted but the man who ran the one place in the city she had felt safe? _

_ "Let's go back to the apartment. There's no point in hanging around here." Jade stretched her tired muscles, knowing the ache was more in her heart than her body. _

_ "You have not eaten. Come, there is a place close by where we can sit and talk before we must face Peter and Andre." Caine led her out of the dark alley back towards Chinatown. They walked wrapped in a comfortable silence, each intent on their own thoughts. The restaurant was cozy and quiet, making conversation less difficult than it had been at the shelter. _

_ "Daniel has had some problems in the past." Jade mused, playing with her soup. She rarely ate this late at night without a bout of insomnia, but the soup was good and hot, and for once she wanted to be awake. "His wife left him when he went on a courier run for us at the start of the Gulf War. Everyone in the agency knew she had a lover, but no one had the time to break that to Daniel. He was shattered. Even now, he has a problem trusting any woman. He was very involved in the runaway shelter before his marriage broke up, and when I heard he had gone back to it after his divorce, I thought maybe thinking of someone else's problems would help him get over his. I would hate to think I was that wrong about him." She pushed away the rest of her dinner, annoyed at herself for being so talkative. _

_ Caine seemed not to notice. "You do not know that you are wrong about this man. Perhaps the girl was murdered after he left her." He pushed her bowl back at her, concerned at her lack of appetite. _

_ "I'm not hungry! God, you're as bad as Andre. He thinks the answer to all my problems is to stuff me full of food or get me drunk. Well this isn't a problem I can make disappear with a bowl of steamed rice or a bottle of tequila. If Daniel has gone bad, the Company will expect me to clean up after him." She sighed, wishing she were talking to her equally world weary partner, instead of his innocent cousin. "That's part of my job, to take care of the members of our elite world. I should have seen this coming. I think I've been in the life so long, I can't feel the normal pain of a broken heart anymore. Mine's been battered so many times by the things I've seen as a field agent, minor things like a lover leaving just don't register anymore. Sometimes I wonder if I'm still human or if I've become like the stone I'm named after, hard and cold." _

_ "There is still a gentle heart in you which cries for others." Caine whispered softly, touched by her confidence. "If there were not, you would not wonder whether you could feel at all. You're concern for my cousin's soul and for this man's life do not come from a heart of stone." _

_ Jade smiled, a sad, tired smile. He was being kind, of course, just like Andre. Though his cousin would have said "Get a grip, partner. You're beginning to sound like a candidate for the funny farm." _

_ "I can tell I need sleep. I'm getting maudlin. Let's go. Maybe the coroners report has come in and we'll have a few more pieces of the puzzle to work with." Jade pushed the soup bowl back away, and

started for the door, Caine following close behind. "Tell me about being an apothecary. I've known some people around this world who swore by herbalists and their knowledge for curing what ails you. Tell me about it." _

_ As they walked, Caine told her about his study of Chinese herbs and medicines and how they could be used to effect ailments that Western medicine could not treat. The subject was of interest to both of them and made the trip back to Caine's apartment seem all too brief. Jade knew she had been perilously close to revealing her heart to this stranger. All she knew of him was that he reminded her of her partner, for whom she had a deep and abiding affection. Andre was more than family and less than a lover to her. He knew her mind and most times her heart. But her soul she kept for herself. Until she had met his older cousin, no man would have touched her enough to give that part of her away. But she feared that the offer would not be accepted, and for today, she decided, she didn't need to add that pain on top of her sadness over her unfortunate friend's plight. Before she realized it, they were at his front door. Inside, Jade could hear Daniel, sobbing something she could not quite make out. It sounded like it was going to be a long night. _

_ Pt. 11 _

_ It was shaping up to be not only a long but difficult night. Daniel had insisted to Jade that he had not been responsible for murdering Annie. He had angrily insisted that Andre was out to get him, for reasons he could not list, and that the entire case was an attempt to frame him. His exhaustion was pushing him towards paranoia. Jade could see that the man was on his last legs, and silently signaled to her partner to put him on ice. Peter watched as the man slumped, unconscious, at Andre's feet. _

_ "Was that necessary?" Peter asked, worried. _

_ "Probably. I know he was having problems sleeping after his wife left. I imagine this situation hasn't helped matters any." Jade took the blanket that Caine offered her and threw it over the unconscious form at her feet. _

_ "Think he's guilty?" Andre asked, staring down their errant friend.

_

_ "Of taking an underage minor from a shelter, yes. Of conduct unbecoming a teen councilor, maybe. Of murder, probably not. He's not devious enough to have set this kind of scenario in place." Jade shrugged, no longer interested in pursuing this line of questioning.

_

_ "I guess my father and Lo Si can watch him for tonight. Can I give you two a ride to wherever you're staying?" Peter put out his hand for his car keys, then noticed the look that passed between the two mercenaries. "Is there a problem?" _

_ "Well, Daniel is our responsibility. Dragon and I should be the ones to watch him." Jade looked thoughtfully at her partner. "If it isn't convenient for us to stay, we can sleep out in my car. It wouldn't be the first time." _

_ Andre groaned in disgust. "Can't we open one of the other safe

houses? I'm too long legged to sleep in the car. I end up with a crick in my back in the morning." _

_ "There is room for both of you here." Caine offered, motioning to his workout room. "The floor is not as comfortable as you are accustomed, but there is room for you to sleep in peace." _

_ Jade considered the offer carefully. Sleeping on the floor was not as bad a proposition to her as Caine might think. She had spent enough time in less comfortable circumstances. Her partner was her main concern. Andre wasn't showing any signs of strain (yet!) but if he had one of his night terrors tonight, she would need room to guide him back to sanity. The room Caine was offering was open, with little furniture to hinder her. And Caine would be nearby, in case this was one of the few time that Andre couldn't hear her voice in his dreams. She smiled, thinking of what she might have planned if her partner were not with her. _

_ "Well, if you don't mind, I think we'll just take you up on that offer. Dragon, where's your bag?" Jade walked back out the door, ignoring the smirk on her partner's face as he followed her. Peter gave his father a worried look "Do you think this is such a good idea, Pop?" _

_ "Andre and I have shared rooms before, my son. I know what to expect from him." _

_ "He's not the one I'm worried about." Peter replied, anxiously. _

_ "Peter..." Caine began, exasperated by his son's tone. "She is less of a threat to me than her partner." _

_ "Yeah, right. So how come she worries me more than he does?" Peter started for the door, then thought better of it. "How about I stay over too?" _

_ "If you wish." Caine turned back to his unconscious guest, effectively ending the conversation. _

_ Outside, Jade and Andre were having discussion of their own _

_ "Nicely done, partner. So when are you planning on making your move on him?" Andre fished his knapsack out of the trunk of Jades car, along with her travel kit. _

_ "I haven't the faintest idea to what you are referring, Dragon. I'm not planning on moving in on anyone." She started back to the building, the stopped suddenly in her tracks, causing Andre to run in to her. Jade looked up at her partner, a sly grin on her face. "Besides, if I were planning anything, you'd be the last person I'd tell. You can't keep your mouth for love nor money." _

_ Andre's laughter followed her back into Caine's apartment. _

_ Pt. 12 _

_ It didn't take long to get everyone settled in their respective niches. Jade had called a member of the "Company" in the local office and ordered him to contact Peter's superiors with some

plausible excuse for his disappearance. The last thing they would need now would be for his fellow officers to put out an all points bulletin on him. While agency intervention often times caused more headaches than it solved, this time Jade decided it was worth a try. And it would be easier than Peter trying to explain their unorthodox actions without some backup. _

_ With Peter's help, they had moved Daniel into the center of the room Caine used for his workouts. The rest spread out according to their taste in sleeping arrangements. Andre chose to be close to the only door into the room. Jade preferred the far wall, with a clear view of the door and Peter had chosen to sleep against the side wall, where he could watch everyone. _

_ Jade had spent some time talking softly to her partner before retiring to her side of the room, sitting behind him with her arms around his neck as they talked. Peter could hear only a few words, enough to know they were speaking neither Chinese nor English. Occasionally one or the other of them would look in his direction while they spoke, as though gauging his reaction to being left out of the conversation. He finally called his office shortly after Jade's had told him of the call to her operative and had been royally chewed out by Captain Simms. She made it clear she wasn't happy with the idea of Peter playing a lone hand along with a group of shadowy intelligence agents whose names and ranks she had been bluntly told not to ask about. But for the moment, she was willing to give him enough rope to hang himself. _

_ Finally, Jade rose and ruffled her partners hair in a fond gesture and retired to her blankets. Silence settled over the room like a blanket, encouraging its occupants to sleep. All but Jade. _

_ "Damm, I knew I shouldn't have eaten so late." Jade thought, staring up at the ceiling. Her insomnia was back with a vengeance, despite the relative peace of their situation. She looked across the room at its occupants, noting that Daniel hadn't moved an inch since they had deposited him on the floor. Peter was curled up in his blankets, looking very young and vulnerable. She couldn't see Andre's face, as he always slept on his side, but she could hear him. They had shared quarters on every mission they had been assigned to and with every mission she had become more attuned to the sound of her partners breathing when he slept, using it to gauge whether he was at peace or in the throes of a nightmare. Tonight, however, those sounds weren't helping lull her to sleep anytime soon. Rising with the grace of years of ballet and martial arts lessons, she tiptoed around the sleeping forms in front of her and walked out toward the terrace.

_

_ Caine was seated outside, playing his wooden flute softly, so as not to wake the others. Jade listened for a while, letting the music flow through her to her soul. She wished they had been out in the country, where she could sit out under the stars and lose herself in its serenity. _

_ "Andre is asleep?" Caine asked, putting his flute aside. _

_ "Yes. He's tired so I didn't expect it would take long. I like the music. Andre plays, sometimes, usually when he's in a reflective mood. I guess I've developed a taste for it." She sat on the ground facing Caine, staying in the shadows so that he couldn't easily see

her face. _

_ "How long have you know my cousin?" Caine stared out at the starry sky, listening for sounds from the other room. _

_ "Oh about, five years. We were assigned to investigate rumors of a gun runner building up a small army in Thailand. He was using stolen military weapons and recruiting from the dregs of the underworld to hire out to the drug producers of the Golden Triangle. Funny thing, we hated each other on sight, the first time we met. He was so arrogant I just wanted to slap him. Come to think of it, I did." Jade laughed softly, remembering the shocked look on Dragon's face. "We came to terms after that and we've been together ever since." _

_ "He cares a great deal for you." _

_ "I'm his best friend, his partner. But love? Well, yes but not the typical type of love that Western society expects of a man and woman who are together as much as we are. I would fight any demon to protect him and he would do the same for me. Sometime, though, I wish.." she stopped, hesitating to speak what was on her mind, unsure that he would take the way she meant it. _

_ "You wish for what?" Caine asked, his voice soft and gentle. _

_ "We didn't have to live with the violence that fills our lives. A normal life for both of us. Just a normal life. Friends, music, dancing then a quiet candlelight dinners with no guns or flak jackets in sight. It's all a dream, though. I could never completely leave this world. To many peoples lives depend on me. I never was one to walk out on my responsibilities." She sighed, and pulled herself back to her feet. "Enough of this, I'd better see to my people. Good night, Master Caine." _

_ "Goodnight, Lady Jade." Caine replied, watching her return to her familiar, dark world. He wished, for a moment, she had stayed. _

_ pt.13 _

_ Jade wandered back to the room where the others were sleeping, mentally kicking herself for showing so much of herself before this stranger. She began to walk around the sprawled form of her partner when suddenly, his hand reached out and caught her by the ankle. Andre rolled onto his back, the better to look up at his friend. He reached out his other hand to help her sit on the floor beside him. "Is there a problem, partner?" he asked. _

_ "Nothing that going back to our compound wouldn't cure. Shove over." She laid down with her back to him, his arms protectively around her. They lay quietly together, secure in the closeness of their relationship. "Tommorrow, Daniel goes back into police custody, no matter what the Company says. We should never have become involved in this local matter. Even if he is one of ours." Jade leaned her head back against his chest, trying to look up into his face. _

_ "Yeah, right. So what's the real reason you want to bug out?" Andre rested his chin on top of her head so that she couldn't easily see his eyes. "Wouldn't have anything to do with my cousin, would it? Come on partner, you and I have always been straight with one another. Tell me what's going on in that twisted mind of yours?" _

_ Jade grinned, the easy familiarity of her partner's words easing her tensions. "Your right, of course. It's just, he makes me feel like ... I don't know. Like maybe I would have a chance at a normal, loving relationship, preferably with him." _

_ "So I'm not normal." Andre teased. _

_ "You were born not normal. Seriously, you and I are like familiy. I love you like you were my own blood, but this is different. Unless there's something you want to tell me?" she asked, suddenly serious.

_

_ "Don't be stupid. Your're my little sister. I'd never chose you for a lover, your not my type. Too bossy." Andre choked, as Jade drove her elbow into his stomache. "I take it back, your're not bossy, just strong willed! And you're right, we should never have become involved here. I just wanted to see the old man again. He has an affect on me, makes me feel like I'm redeemable. Like you do. And to introduce the two of you. I thought you might just be good for each other." _

_ "Damm! I knew it, you're playing match maker again! Andre...!" Jade started to squirm out of his embrace, but Andre too strong to escape. "When I get loose, I'm going to kill you!" _

_ "You have to get loose first." _

_ "Will the two of you keep it down! How's a person suppose to get any sleep with you fighting?" Peter sat up, tired of pretending to be asleep. He hadn't heard much of their conversation, but the whispering had made him curious. "Do you need help, Jade?" Peter doubted that she did, since all Andre seemed to be doing was holding her down. It looked more like they kind of play wrestling he had done with Carolyn and Kelly when they were younger. _

_ "NO! Go back to sleep, Peter. I can handle this arrogant, opinionated, ass all by my self." Jade struggled to get one arm free, giggling in spite of herself. She could hear Andre laughing, his voice muffled by her hair. _

_ "Okay, but call me if you need me." Peter stole a quick glance at their sleeping prisoner, then lay back down against the wall. "But if you woke me, you're probably going to wake Daniel." _

_ "He's not asleep, he's unconcious. Nothing short of a bomb going off will wake him." Andre replied. _

_ After about twenty minutes, Jade stopped struggling, knowing that all she was accomplishing was her own exhaustion. Her insomnia was disapating and she could feel herself start to relax enough to sleep. She felt her partner relax his grip on her as he, also, grew tired of their game. Jade wondered, briefly, what Caine would think if he knew his cousin had planned this meeting from the beginning. "If this murder hadn't taken place, what excuse would Andre have used to get me here?" She sighed, too tired now to even be annoyed. Soon all in the room were fast asleep. _

_ pt.14 _

_ The next morning Peter took Daniel back to the precinct for another round of questioning. Daniel had awakened, still groggy from whatever Andre had done to him, but still protesting his innocence. Jade hoped that whatever the medical examiner had found would give the distraught man ammunition to prove his innocence. That, however, was the least of her concerns. There was the Company, with its emphasis on secrecy, to deal with. And the relocation of her team to deep cover, civilian assignments in the area. And there was Caine. _

_ "I'm beginning to think life on the road was a lot simpler than life as a civilian." Jade commented, trying to pull her boots on.

_

_ Andre grinned at her, a wicked gleam in his eyes. "I won't say I told you so, but..." _

_ "Then don't." she threw the boot at him, then ducked as he threw it back. "You're going to be insufferable today, aren't you?" _

_ "What do you mean today? I thought I was insufferable everyday."

_

_ Caine walked into the middle of their playful banter, Jade's cellular phone in his hand. "I think this belongs to you?" _

_ "Must have dropped it last night, after I talked to our people. I'm forever trying to lose that thing." She reached up from the floor to take back her phone, her eyes locking onto the older man's. Then she shook her head and reached out to her partner for help in getting up.

_

_ Andre hauled his partner up off the floor, trying not to look too pleased with himself. Jade gave him a "Don't mess with me, I'm not in a good mood" look. The former mercenary decided that discretion was the better part of valor and began to gather their sleeping gear and move it out to the car. Caine turned to help and was waved off by the younger man. _

_ "Don't bother, this is my job. We'll be out of your hair in just a few minutes, cousin." _

_ "You are not ... in my hair...?" Caine watched his younger cousin efficiently pack all their gear into the small bags they had unloaded from the car the previous night. He was aware of Jade's presence at his side, a feeling different than the one he had last night. Something had transpired during the night to annoy her and Caine wondered if it had anything to do with him. _

_ "Done. I'll move this out to the car and we'll be on our way. It's been real, Cousin." Andre surprised Caine by putting his arms around him in an affectionate hug. "Maybe we'll see each other again soon, if that's okay with you?" _

_ "I will be happy to have your company again, Cousin." Caine playfully slapped Andre on the cheek, something he had never dared try before. The younger man grinned wickedly, then slapped him back. Jade shook her head, trying not to laugh at the startled look on the priest's face. _

_ "Enough. Go and wait for me in the car. I'll be down in a second."

she shoved her partner out the door, ignoring his laughter at her expense. Then she turned to face Caine. _

_ "Well, I guess this is goodbye. I'm not sure when I'll be back in this area again. Maybe, when Andre comes to visit I'll tag along?" she sounded a little wistfull, like a stranger unsure of her welcome.

_

_ "You are always welcome in my home." Caine reached out to take her hands, when a horn started blaring from outside the building. _

_ "Damm that man, he can't sit still for more than 30 seconds without getting into something. I'd better go before someone calls the cops." She started to leave then stopped. Taking a deep breath, she turned and, laying her hands on his chest, kissed him. He gently laid his hands on her back, holding her close. Then she pushed herself back and with a smile, left his rooms. Caine watched her go without a word. _

_ Outside, Andre had stopped honking the horn and was using Jade's cellular to talk to Peter at the precinct. He handed the device to Jade with a satisfied sigh. _

_ "Peter says forensics came back with a blood type on skin tissue found under Annies fingernails. It doesn't match Daniels. And they picked up some guy at a motel with a teenage hooker last night that had one of the shelters cards in his pocket. Peter thinks it may be the guy Daniel mentioned to us, the one he saw hasstling the kids. Looks like our courier may be off the hook after all." Andre watched his partner settle behind the wheel, noting her unusuall silence. "Earth to Jade, is anyone there?" _

_ "I heard you. I'm glad Daniel's going to be fine. Peter will see to cleaning up the loose ends and I'll arrange for Daniel to get some help on resolving his problems." She gunned the engine and started for the airport, then looked over at her partner with a mysterious grin. "I'm glad we're resettling you here, Dragon. You and Peter will be good for each other. Maybe I'll settle here too. This city has developed a certain... attraction ... for me." They drove off into the city, Andre's laughter drowned out by the sound of the engine. Behind them, the sound of a flute soared to the sky. _

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